



Differentiating liberatory and oppressive collective occupations in occupational reconstructions theory

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Social Transformation ≠ Liberation

- **Occupational reconstructions** is a theory that describes how occupations can be employed to foster social transformation (Frank and Muriithi, 2015).
- It describes **collective action aimed at social transformation** as those that:
 - Respond to a problematic situation.
 - Have meaning and purpose.
 - Are comprised of embodied practices.
 - Have a narrative structure.
 - Open up spaces for creative transformations.
 - Involve voluntary participation.
 - Are hopeful experiments.
- **However, none of the principles differentiate whether the social transformation supports liberation or oppression, and for whom.**



Liberating/Oppressive Occupations

- This matters because **occupations can be acts of resistance or reproduction of social order** (Angell, 2014).
- Occupational science and occupational therapy research **has yet to clearly articulate what makes occupations liberating or oppressive.**
- This poses a risk of reproducing ideologies that quietly shape habits of mind in research, such as **neoliberalism, racism, and capitalism** (dos Santos, 2022; Lavalley & Johnson, 2022).
- Upon analyzing a collective occupation, **we invite scholars to also reflect on:**
 - Who gains power, and who loses?
 - Is harm (re)produced? To whom?
 - Is that harm in response to oppression?



Towards a Liberating Axiology

- Thus, we argue that **future research on social transformation in occupational therapy and science needs to include articulation of explicit values (axiology)** and examination of oppression/liberation.
- To do so, we can draw from scholarship oriented at liberation (such as Freire, 1970), which suggests that collective action should foster:
 - **Critical consciousness** of structural oppression.
 - **Praxis** (reflection and action).
 - **Solidarity** with historically oppressed communities.
 - **Humanization** (rather than humanitarianism).
- Liberation means supporting people to live nourishing lives.



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